RECENT EVENTS RELATED TO THE KLAMATH PROJECT

Contact: Frank Michny, 916.978.5025

Fall 2002 Fish Die-Off
More than 33,000 salmon and steelhead died in the lower Klamath River in late 2002 on their way to spawning areas upstream. According to the California Department of Fish and Game, the cause of death was infection by protozoan and bacterial pathogens. Preliminary analysis indicates two factors that may have contributed to the disease incidence are high water temperature and low streamflow. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expects to issue reports regarding the extent and causative factors related to this fish die-off this summer or fall.

The New A Canal Fish Screen and Headgates
Reclamation completed installation of a large automated fish screen and new headgate structure in the A Canal inlet on Upper Klamath Lake. This is the largest single point of diversion for irrigation water used for the Project. The fish screen and headgates were completed and operational at the beginning of the 2003 irrigation season.

2003 Operations Plan
Reclamation issued the 2003 Operations Plan on April 10, 2003 calling for irrigation deliveries, lake levels and river flows consistent with a "dry" water year and the 2002 biological opinions for endangered suckers and threatened coho salmon. Unusually high precipitation and cool temperatures during the rest of April and early May resulted in increased inflows to Upper Klamath Lake and the water year forecast was changed to "below average" on June 13. However, forecast inflows failed to materialize and Upper Klamath Lake elevations began to quickly decline and threatened to go below the June 30 water levels needed for endangered suckers. Irrigators voluntarily reduced Project water deliveries by 20-30 percent. Continued dry conditions and decreased inflows resulted the water year being reclassified as "dry" again on July 10, 2003. Meeting Biological opinion requirements and irrigation demands will remain a challenge this year.

Water Bank
During early 2003, Reclamation acquired water for the 2003 water bank mandated by the 2002 biological opinions through crop idling and groundwater substitution programs—the crop idling program enrolled over 14,400 acres and reduced irrigation demand by about 35,000 acre-feet at a cost of $2.7 million. The groundwater substitution program replaced Project water with almost 24,000 acre-feet of groundwater at a cost of about $1.8 million. The water bank was used to augment Klamath River flow at Iron Gate Dam by an additional 200-500 cfs from mid-May through early July.

Project Operations EIS
Reclamation issued a Federal Register Notice in early May 2003 announcing its renewed effort to prepare an EIS on Klamath Project operations. This effort, previously started in the late 1990's, had been stalled due to overriding operational, drought and Endangered Species Act-related issues. Reclamation initiated a formal scoping period with the notice that continues through September 2, 2003 (the notice and Scoping Document can be viewed at www.usbr.gov/mp/kbao/).

Litigation
A ruling from the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California on the Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman's Associations (plaintiff) v. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (defendant) is anticipated soon. This case involves the validity of several portions of the May 25, 2002 biological opinion issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service (now referred to as NOAA Fisheries) on the effects of Project operation on threatened coho salmon. This Biological Opinion is a keystone for Project operation and the ruling could have significant bearing on that operation.